The French voyageurs to Minnesota during the seventeenth century /

THE FRENCH VOYAGEURS TO MINNESOTA DURING THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

[An Address delivered by Rev. Edward D. Neill , before the Annual Meeting of the Society, January 1, 1850.]

The discoverers of the Northwest, in temperament, education, religion, and pursuit, were the very opposite of those who settled on the shores of Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut River. The latter were men of calm temperament and stern faith. Looking up to Heaven, acknowledging no superior but their blessed Redeemer—panting after no conquest but over their own evil desires—seeking after no hidden treasures but those hid in Christ—they sought not to extend the domination of Great Britain, nor to acquire wealth by hazardous enterprises, but were content to till the land around their immediate settlements, to study the Divine Word, and to train up their children to fear the Lord.

The former, however, were men of ardent and excitable temperament. They were stimulated both by their creed and their nation to explore new lands. They were taught that the converting of the heathen to the religion of Rome, and that conquests in behalf of the sovereign of France, were particularly meritorious.

Hence, the colonists of Acadia, accompanied by priests bound by no social ties, were ever ready to desert their farms and families to enter into lands where wealth might be obtained for their employers, or glory for their church.

While the colonists of New England were looked upon by Charles as outcasts, and dull, canting Roundheads, those of Acadia heard the praises of an applauding government at every step they took towards the interior of the continent. Though at times they did sow in tears, they reaped a speedy harvest in joy.

Some years before the disciples of the Puritan, Robinson , landed on the icy coast of Plymouth, the disciples of St. Francis had penetrated the forests, even to the waters that empty into Lake Huron; before the May Flower with her precious freight, weighed anchor from Southampton, there was a French settlement at Quebec; before Harvard University was in operation, the disciples of Ignatius Loyola , aided by the prayers, sympathies and money of French Papists, were establishing educational institutions on the banks of the St. Lawrence. The son of a Marquis gave six thousand gold crowns towards the establishment of a college; a rich and youthful widow had founded a seminary for girls; and the renowned Richeleiu, with a female relative, assisted to endow a public hospital under the care of Ursuline nuns.

The journals of the first missionaries to the Hurons, were perused with like enthusiasm by the kings, queens, statesmen, merchants, artizans and peasants of Papal Europe. The lovers of romance wept freely over the sufferings of the priests, and the reported conversion of so many to the faith. The enterprising merchant, encouraged the missions that were opening so many new avenues of trade.

Before proceeding to a sketch of the explorers and explorations in Minnesota during the seventeenth century, let us 19 rapidly glance at the progress of discovery in the countries adjacent. As early as 1634, the Indians had learned to bring their furs to Quebec, and received European manufactures in exchange. In September of that year, two priests, Brebœuf and Daniel , determined to accompany a party of Hurons to their forest home, and teach them the doctrines of the Christian religion. They were the first Europeans that erected a house in the neighborhood of Lake Huron.

Seven years after, a bark canoe, containing priests of the same order, passed through the river Ottawa, and coasted along the shores of Lake Huron, to visit, by invitation, the Ojibwas, at the outlet of Lake Superior. After a voyage of seventeen days, they arrived at the Falls of St. Mary, where they found assembled two thousand of that tribe, who now dwell in the north eastern portion of our Territory.

While here, they obtained much information, calculated to inflame the zeal of the Society of Jesus, and their patrons in Europe. Here for the first time, civilized man, learned that the nation of Dakotas, amid whose lodges we reside, was in existence. The Ojibwas informed the missionaries that the Dakotas lived eighteen days' journey farther to the west.

Thus, says Bancroft , in his eloquent chapter on Jesuit Missions, “did the religious zeal of the French bear the cross to the banks of the St. Mary, and the confines of Lake Superior, and look wistfully toward the home of the Sioux in the valley of the Mississippi, five years before the apostle Elliot , had addressed the tribe of Indians that dwelt within six miles of Boston Harbor.”

Either accompanying the missionary, devoted to a life of poverty, or in his immediate rear, followed the trader, devoted to a life of gain; so that a chapel was hardly surmounted with a cross, before a trading house stood by its side. In the year 1654, two adventurous young men, connected 20 with the fur trade, followed a party of Indians in their hunting excursions for two years, and were probably the first white men that ever penetrated the Dakota country.

Upon their return to Quebec, they gave such glowing accounts of the lands they had seen, the lakes they had crossed, the nations they had become acquainted with, among whom were the Sioux or Dakotas, that both trader and ecclesiastic, burned with desire to go up and possess the land. Even the bishop of Quebec, was ready to be the pioneer in planting the symbol of his faith among the newly discovered tribes. But it was at length decided that the aged Mesnard , who had obtained dearly purchased experience among the Indians of

Western New York, should carry the religion of Rome to the shores of Lake Superior. With an ardor that every one must admire, he loitered not after his appointment, but leaving the pleasant society of his associates, he pushed onward to the field of labor, to use his own language, trusting “in the Providence which feeds the little birds of the desert, and clothes the wild flowers of the forest,” and expecting that his friends would shortly add him “to the memento of deaths.”

Hoping against hope, he reached the shores of Superior in safety. After residing on the southern shore of the Lake about eight months, he started on a journey for the Bay of Che-goi-me-gon. But one person accompanied him, and while his companion was making, as it is supposed, what is called the Keweena Portage, Mesnard was lost in the forest. Whether he died from starvation, exposure, or the tomahawk, has never been discovered. There is a tradition that his cassock and prayer book were kept as amulets for many years by the Dakotas.*

* The Dakotas assert, that they murdered the first white man, who visited them. Was he Mesnard?

The melancholy disappearance of this aged soldier of the 21 church, did not deter Claude Allouez , also a Jesuit, from visiting the shores of Lake Superior, in the year 1665.

At that early date, there were rumors that there was a large mass of copper on the southern shore, but his search for it was unavailing. Pushing beyond Ontonagon, the adventurous man did not stop until he reached the Island of La Pointe, the ancient residence of the Ojibwas, who were then, as often times now, planning a war party against their enemies, the Dakotas. He, then, must be regarded as the first white man of whom we have authentic account, who first trod the soil on the confines of Minnesota. According to the Ojibway tradition, the first white men at La Pointe, were traders, who had been confined by the ice, and were found in a starving condition, eating their cloth and blankets. Yet, that priests were here at a very early period, is very certain, from the fact that a small

silver crucifix of antique workmanship, has been lately ploughed up in that vicinity. At that period, the territory of the Dakotas extended quite to the shores of Superior, and Allouez in his intercourse with them, was the first to learn of the existence of a great river, which he calls the “Messipi.”

During his two years residence in the North West, he rounded the Mission of the Holy Spirit, and passed his time in teaching the Ojibwas the “Pater Noster” and “Ave Maria;” in endeavoring to awaken their slumbering consciences by pictures of hell and the judgment day, and in obtaining information from the Sioux or Dakota nation.

His labors were so successful, that he returned to Quebec to solicit assistance, but his heart remained with the Ojibwas, and in two days, he was on his return route, accompanied by a fellow laborer named Nicholas .

In 1668, he was cheered by the arrival of two others, named Dablon and Marquette , the latter of whom, was destined to become known to posterity.

22

Marquette , during his missionary tours in the vicinity Lake Superior, had heard so much of the “great river Messipi,” that he determined to take the first favorable opportunity to discover it.

On the 10th of July, 1673, in company with a French Envoy, and five others, they left the Mission at Green Bay, ascended the Fox River, made a portage, and descended the Wisconsin. After paddling their birch canoes for seven days, without meeting man or beast, they reached its mouth, and floated on the bosom of the “Father of Waters.” Fearing nothing, excited by the very danger of the adventure,

“Day after day they glided adown the turbulent river; Night after night, by their blazing fires, encamped on its borders. Now through rushing chutes, among green islands where plume-like Cotton-trees nodded their shadowy crests, they swept with the current, Then

emerged into broad lagoons, where silvery sand-bars Lay in the stream, and along the rippling waves of their margin, Shining with snow-white plumes, large flocks of pelicans waded, They were approaching the region where reigns perpetual summer,”

Nor did they cease descending, until they left the Wisconsin eleven hundred miles above them. Returning by the way of the Illinois river to Chicago, they proceeded by Lake Michigan to Green Bay, where they arrived about the. last of September. This voyage excited much conversation and speculation, in old as well as new France.

At this time there dwelt in Canada, a native of Rouen, named La Salle , who not only possessed an adventurous disposition, but was also a man of foresight, determination and finished education. While a student at a Jesuit College in France, he was distinguished for his proficiency in mathematics.

At the time of Marquette's return from the Mississippi, he was living at his trading post at the junction of the St. Lawrence with Lake Ontario, where the town of Kingston stands. Around Fort Frontenac, for that was the name of the post, there were gathered a few French families and priests.

23

The more La Salle dwelt upon the discovery of Marquette and Joliet , the greater his eagerness to complete what had been commenced, and to discover what he believed to exist, a short route to China and Japan from the head waters of the Mississippi. To obtain the patronage of Louis XIV, he sailed for France, and in the year 1678, received permission to make discoveries in the western part of New France, to build forts wherever they were necessary, and the exclusive right to the trade in buffalo skins, which were just beginning to be known and valued in Europe.

Among the priests at Frontenac, was a native of Flanders, a Franciscan of the meditative order, styled Recollect. From early life, he evinced a roving disposition, and the stories of

the sailors who used to enter the harbors of Calais and Dunkirk, where he had resided, are said to have created a strong desire in him to see the New World.

His name was Louis Hennepin ; vain, boasting, and ambitious, he suffers by comparison with the meek, unostentatious and comparatively truthful Marquette . While La Salle Was absent, the Franciscan passed his time in Missionary tours among the Iroquois, and is said to have visited the present capital of the State of New York. When La Salle returned from France, he despatched a small sel to Niagara river, laden with materials for building a ship suitable for navigating the lakes. Among the passengers was Hennepin , who with eight others, landed and traveled some thirty leagues through the woods, to hold a council with the Senecas, whose good will they obtained.

On the 20th of January, 1679, La Salle joined the party, encamped on the shores of the Niagara river, and strained every nerve in making preparations for a great western voyage. In a week, a dock yard was not only selected, but the keel of a ship laid. The builders plied the adze and the hammers vigorously, though in fear that the Indians would 24 apply the torch to their work and the tomahawk to their scalps. When they began to murmur, Father Hennepin began to exhort, and as he says, “allay their fears.”

In six months, the vessel was ready for launching. It was named the Griffin, in compliment to Count Frontenac , the Governor of Canada, whose armorial bearings were adorned by two griffins. It was defended by a few guns, and ornamented by an eagle and a griffin on its prow.

By means of ropes, the vessel was towed from the Niagara river to Lake Erie, much to the astonishment of the natives. On the 7th of August, 1679, La Salle, Hennepin , and some thirty others, entered the ship, and spread their sails to the breeze. The waters of Lake Erie bore the vessel most gallantly, and in three days they were in the vicinity of the spot, where now stands the city of Detroit. Passing through the Lake, which they named St. Clair, in honor of one of the saints of the Church of Rome, they entered Lake Huron.

Here they encountered one of those terrible storms, which even the experienced sailor of modern days, dreads. All but the pilot, who, according to Hennepin , was destitute of religious feeling, began to pray to the Patron Saint, Anthony , of Padua. But not a hair of their heads was injured; the waves at last fell to sleep, and upon the 27th of the month, they safely moored in one of the harbors of Mackinaw Island.

Here Hennepin and the other ecclesiastics celebrated mass, and La Salle , wrapped in a scarlet cloak edged with gold, visited the assembled Indians. This being a desirable point for trade with the tribes, a fort was built. Leaving Mackinaw, they entered Lake Michigan, and anchored at an island at the mouth of Green Bay. In two weeks time the Griffin was freighted with furs to the amount of $12,000 and sent back to Niagara, which point she never reached, and as it was supposed; was wrecked in another storm.

Leaving Green Bay in four birch canoes, La Salle and his 25 followers coasted along the eastern boundary of Wisconsin, and at last pitched their tents in the neighborhood of Milwaukee River. Fatigued and without a supply of food, they were much disheartened; but the Indians in the vicinity proved friendly, and administered to their wants.

After being exposed to many perils by land and by water, they landed on the 1st of November, at the mouth of the river St. Joseph in Michigan. Late in the season, they started from thence for the Illinois river; but before they reached that stream, provisions again grew scarce. In their extremity, Providence assisted; for says Hennepin , a stray buffalo was found sticking fast in a marsh, which served for food. After a journey of three hundred miles, they at last reached the Illinois, and descended to an Indian village situated near the present town of Ottawa. Winter being at hand, the inhabitants were on their annual hunt; but the travellers pressed with hunger, could not refrain from helping themselves to some of the corn.

They continued to proceed down the river, until the 1st of January, 1680, when they halted, and had a new year's celebration, consisting of religious services by Hennepin and other priests.

The ceremonies being over, they entered Lake Peoria, at the lower end of which, they discovered an encampment of Indians. After the red men had recovered from their astonishment, they invited the strangers to their cabins, and passed the day in feasting.

La Salle told them that he had come to impart a knowledge of the true God, and to supply them with fire-arms, in the place of the awkward weapons they had been accustomed to use. The night after he made this speech, a chief of a tribe residing on Fox river, stole into the camp, and calling the chiefs together, told them that he had been informed that the Frenchmen were allied with their old enemies, the Irequois. 26 This false intelligence communicated to the Indians by La Salle's enemies, produced much consternation. The next morning, in the place of cordiality, the travelers found only coldness and suspicion. The commander inquired the cause of the sudden change, and he was then told the whole tale. A man of uncommon tact and address, he soon regained their confidence. He now began to inquire about the Mississippi, and spoke of his plan of building a boat, after the white man's fashion, to sail upon that stream. The principal men of the camp did not fully approve of this plan, and they attempted to dissuade him, by saying “that the banks of the Mississippi were inhabited by a gigantic race of men, who killed all travelers; that it was filled with crocodiles, serpents and monsters as well as fails and rapids, and that there was a dreadful whirlpool at its mouth.”

The discernment of La Salle convinced him that this was what we vulgarly term a “hoax,” and he arose and told the spokesman, that his sayings were stamped with improbability. These stories however, caused six of the company to desert, and others to complain.

As it was now too cold to travel with comfort, the erection of a fort was commenced not far distant from the town of Peoria.

Here, in the interior of the North American Continent, two years before the Quaker Penn , purchased of the Indians, the spot where the city of Philadelphia now stands, might be heard the sound of the saw, the blowing of the forge, the stroke of the sledge, and the ring of the anvil. In less than six weeks, and in the midst of winter, this exploring hand had erected a log fort, which they named Crevecoeur, and the hull of a vessel 42 feet long and 12 broad, which was to have been employed in navigating the Mississippi. The necessary cordage and rigging being absent, the ship could not be completed.

27

But La Salle was still intent upon discovering a short route to the “wealth of Ormus and of Ind,” and therefore ordered Father Hennepin to proceed on a voyage to the sources of the Mississippi.

This was not unwelcome intelligence to the forward Franciscan; and on the last day of February, 1680, with one canoe laden with goods, and two companions, Picard du Gay and Michel Ako , he began his long and dangerousjourney.

In seven days he had reached the mouth of the Illinois; but on account of the floating ice, he had to wait some time before he could ascend the “Meschasipi,” as he termed the river upon the banks of which we dwell. By the 11th of April, he had paddled as far as the Wisconsin river, in the vicinity of which he met a flotilla of canoes, filled with Issati or Dakota Indians, called Issati or Issanti, as it is supposed, after their ancient residence at Mille Lac. With them he passed through the Lac des Pleurs, shortly after called Pepin, which name it still retains, which he thus describes: “About thirty leagues above Black River, we found the Lake of Tears, which we named so, because the savages who took us, as it will be hereafter related, consulted in this place, what they should do with their prisoners, those who were for murdering, cried all night upon us, to oblige by their tears, their companions to consent to our death. The lake is formed by the ‘Meschasipi,’ and may be seven leagues tong and five broad.”

As the Dakotas were generally very kind in the treatment of their white captives, very little credence can be given the tale of the Father's captivity.

After nineteen days' travel with the Indians, he discovered a cataract, which he says, “indeed of itself is terrible, and hath something very astonishing.” He reported the falls to be 60 feet in height, which is quite moderate for the, 28 man who published those at Niagara to be 600 feet. Near the cataract was a bear-skin upon a pole, a sort of oblation to the spirit in the waters.

After carving the cross and the arms of France on a tree, and calling them after the Patron Saint of the expedition, the eloquent divine, Anthony of Padua, he abandoned his canoe and journeyed by land to the residence of the Indians, on a stream, which in honor of the founder of his order, he called St. Francis.† Their manner of welcoming a stranger at that time, seems to have been very peculiar. Says Hennepin , “at tho entry of the chief's cabin, who had adopted me, one of the barbarians, who seemed to be very old, presented me with a great pipe to smoke, and weeping over me all the while with abundance of tears, rubbed both my arms and my head. This was to show how concerned he was to see me so harassed and fatigued. And indeed, I had often need enough of two men to support me, when I was up, or raise me when I was down. There was a bear's skin before the fire, upon which the youngest boy of the cabin caused me to lie down, and then with the grease of wild-cats, annointed my thighs, legs and soles of my feet.”

† Now called Elk River.

The first of white men then, who looked upon the Fails of St. Anthony, was not a Jesuit, as Steinmetz , misled by Kip's eloquent preface to the “early Jesuit Missions in North America,” asserts; but a Franciscan of the Recollect branch.

While Hennepin was dwelling upon the banks of the St. Francis, he was agreeably surprised by the arrival of a party of French traders from Lake Superior, under the direction

of a Sieur de Luth , and probably among the first who had ever penetrated so far into the interior of the Dakota country. About the last of September, 1680, the whites left the Indian village, and descending the Mississippi as far 29 as the Wisconsin, they proceeded by way of that stream, and Green Bay, to Quebec. Hennepin did not tarry long in that city; but went to France, and in 1683, published book of travels under the title of “A Description of Louisiana,” as all of the Valley of the Mississippi was then called.

Had the restless Franciscan remained contented with the reputation acquired by the discovery of the Fails of St. Anthony, posterity would have viewed his exaggerations and mis-statements with a kindly eye, and remembered his name with pleasure.

But in an evil hour, he was tempted to claim the honor of not only discovering the source, but the mouth of the Mississippi; and to sustain the claim, he contradicted what he previously asserted, and committed one of the meanest plagiarisms on record. After the renowned La Salle had met an untimely end, by the hand of a conspirator, Le Clercq published the letters of Father Zenobe and Anastase , giving a description of the scenery and productions of the Lower Mississippi. Hennepin , with the aid of these missionary letters, and a fertile imagination, prepared a book entitled “New Discovery of a vast country situated in America, between New Mexico and the Frozen Ocean.” In this he is daring enough to state, that he paddled a canoe with the aid of two men, from the Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico and back, more than 2500 miles, in forty-nine days.

Anticipating the query from some inquisitive Frenchman, “why did you not say something about the discovery of the mouth of the Mississippi, in your first work, published more than ten years since?” he framed a most awkward and insufficient apology. After stating that La Salle Was envious and jealous of him, he remarks that he was also unfriendly, because during his first voyage to France, when a gay company of young women commenced dancing upon the deck 30 of the ship, he had reprimanded them for their gaiety; La Salle who was a fellow passenger, “interposed, and said there was no harm in dancing, and that the Franciscan had overstepped the bounds of his authority. Warm words ensued, and we

are called upon to believe that by this frivolous incident, a root of bitterness was planted in his bosom which was never eradicated."

None of his excuses sustained Hennepin's reputation; and shortly after, we find him in his old age, leaving France. Crossing the Channel, he published in London, another edition of his real and fictitious discoveries in the Valley of the Mississippi, and staunch Romanist as he professed to be,entered into the pay of England's Protestant King, Wiliam the III, who was anxious to be the rival of France in colonizing the banks of the Mississippi, and willing "to leap over twenty stumbling blocks rather than not effect it."

As a town in the State of Illinois has already taken the name of Hennepin , which would have been so appropriate for our neighboring and beautiful village of St. Anthony, we take leave of the discoverer of those picturesque fails, which will always render that town equally attractive to the eye of the poet and capitalist, by suggesting, that the island which divides the "laughing waters,"* be called Hennepin , who though as Bancroft says, "a boastful liar,"† was nevertheless a "daring discoverer."

* The Dakota Indians call the Falls of St. Anthony, "Rara" from Irara, to laugh.

† Tho French call him "the great liar."

Eight years after Hennepin announced the discovery of the Falls of St. Anthony to his friends in Canada, another exploration of the Valley of the Upper Mississippi, was undertaken by Baron Lahontan . About the last of September, 1688, with a large party of French and Indians, he departed with his heavily laden canoes from the Fort at Mackinaw, and proceeded by the usual and natural route by Green Bay, 31 Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, to the Mississippi, upon whose waters he floated on the 23d of October. Ascending this stream, he says, that on the 3d of November, he entered into a river that was almost without a current, and at its mouth filled with rushes. He remarks, moreover, that he ascended it for more than 500 miles. Upon its banks, dwelt three nations; the Eokoros, Essannapes and the Gnacsitares On account of its great length, having been employed

sixty days in its ascent, he named it Riviere Longue. As there is no stream in existence that answers to the description, many have been inclined to look upon the account of Baron Lahontan , in the same light as they view the stories of Baron Munchausen , Others more credulous, have credited him with the discovery of the Minnesota or Saint Pierre River. Nicollet supposes that the Riviere Longue of Lahontan was Cannon River, which enters the Mississippi near the head of Lake Pepin, and that this stream was then an Outlet of the Minnesota. A reference to the map, shows that there is but a short distance between the sources of Cannon River, and the Le Sueur and other tributaries of the Mankato or Blue Earth Rivers.

Bradford in his “Notes on the North West,” agrees with Nicollet . He remarks “there is very clear evidence, from geological indications that the whole Upper Mississippi was at one time submerged; and it is highly probable, that in the gradual subsidence of the waters which may not have taken place in 1690 or 1700, to the extent it has now attained, a great lake may have covered all that area.

The supposition that he passed through Cannon River, is not improbable. The sources of Cannon River are within four or five miles of an eastern branch of Blue Earth River, and the intervening ground is a perfect level. The communication may at the time of the voyage, have been complete, or been made so, by a freshet, and he would thus have 32 passed through the Blue Earth into St. Peter's River.”*

* “ Having procured a copy of Lahontan's book, in which there is a roughly made map of his Long River, I was struck with the resemblance of its course as laid down, with that of Cannon River. which I had previously sketched in my own field book. I soon convinced myself that the principal statements of the Baron in reference to the country, and the few details he gives of the physical character of the river, coincide remarkably with what I had laid down, as belonging to Cannon River.

Thus the lakes and swamps corresponded; traces of Indian villages mentioned by him, might be found in the growth of a wild grass that propagates itself around all old Indian settlements. His account of the mouth of the river is particularly accurate. ”We entered the mouth of this Long River, which is a sort of large lake filled with cane breaks, in the midst of which we discovered a narrow channel, which we followed up.“— [Nicollet's Report.

Keating supposed that the Hoka or Root River, was the one referred to by Lahontan , and remarks, ”it is impossible to read the Baron Lahontan's account of this river, without being convinced that the greater part, if not the whole of it, is a deception.“

When doctors disagree, it would be vain for us to attempt to decide.

Lahontan having navigated the streams in this region, (perhaps the St. Peter's giver,) descended the Mississippi as far as the junction of the Ohio.

Upon his return, he stepped at Fort Crevecyœur, on the Illinois, the post from which Hennepin had departed in 1680, on his exploring tour to the sources of the Mississippi.

Though La Salle had been cruelly murdered by a member of his exploring party, his friend, Count Frontenac , the Governor of Canada, continued to prosecute with vigor, discoveries, and the establishment of commercial relations with the Indian tribes in the Mississippi valley.

In 1695, he deputed a Monsieur Le Sueur , to build a fort on an island in the Mississippi, in order that peaceful relations might be maintained with the Ojibwas and Dakotas. Returning to Montreal, a chief from each of these then, as now warlike tribes, accompanied him. While in that city, the Dakota chief, the first that had ever been there, 33 with much ceremony, presented to the Governor, as many arrows as his nation had villages, and entreated that his tribe might enjoy the same privileges of trade as other Indian nations.

Le Sueur brought back the news, that there were mines of lead and copper in the Sioux country, and hastened to France, to lay the information before Louis the XIV.

Entirely successful in his application for a grant to work the mines, he left Europe in 1697; but just as he came in sight of Newfoundland, the ship in which he was sailing was captured by the British;and the passengers carried as captives to Portsmouth. The next year he was released, and returned to Paris. Receiving a fresh patent, he started anew to explore the mines, believed to be not many miles distant from the spot on which we dwell. After he arrived in Canada, it was impossible for him to execute his plans, and he returned a third time to the mother country.

The commencement of the year 1699, found a distinguished Canadian in the naval service of the French eminent. His name was Iberville ; and with several ships and a company of colonists, he went forth to establish a settlement on the Mississippi. They built a fort 80 miles North East of New Orleans, and here in 1700, we find Le Sueur , whoappears to have possessed indomitable perseverance.

By the order of Iberville, Le Sueur , with a company of 20 men, proceeded to explore the mines in the Dakota country, of which he had given an account five years before. On the 1st of September, 1700, he had reached the mouth of the Wisconsin. Fourteen days after this, he was at the entrance of the Chippewa, on a branch of which, he had said he had discovered a lump of copper weighing 60 pounds. Passing through Lac des Pleurs, which at that early date had begun to be called Lake Pepin, he reached, on the 16th 2 34 of September, the mouth of a river, where a Monsieur St. Croix was drowned, and in memory of whom, it received the name it now bears. Three days after this, he entered the Minnesota, or St. Peter's River, which was not mentioned by Hennepin , the sight of it as he ascended the stream, being obscured perhaps, by the island which is at its mouth.

Carver informs us, thai when he visited this country in 1766, there were on the eastern side of Lake Pepin, the ruins of a trading post, that had been, in early days, under the

superintendence of a captain St. Pierre , and after him, probably did Le Sueur call the Minnesota River.*

* Since the above was written, we find the following statement in Nicollet's Report. “As for my part, I have no hesitation in assigning its origin to a Canadian, by the name of St. Pierre.”

On the 1st of October, Le Sueur had ascended the Minnesota to the mouth of the Mankato or Blue Earth River, about 150 miles above Fort Shelling. He there erected a trading post or fort, which did not give satisfaction to the Kapoja and other bands of Dakotas, in our vicinity. They claimed that the fort should have been on their lands, at the continence of the Minnesota and Mississippi, where Mendeta, the post of the Fur Company is now situated ; because they were the first with whom the French had traded and furnished with fire-arms. The fort was called L'Huillier, after a scientific Parisian, and is said to be marked upon a map published at Amsterdam, in 1720.

Having completed the necessary buildings, on the 26th of October, with three canoes, he proceeded to the locality where the Blue Earth was found. After passing the winter in digging, he returned with several thousand pounds of this bluish green earth, to the mouth of the Mississippi, from whence 4,000 pounds were transported to France, where it appears to have been of the same value as the sand of the Virginia colonists in England, a century previous.

35

In the vicinity of the Blue Earth, were said to be mines of copper; but geologists and others, who have lately explored the country, while they describe the blue pigment used by the Indians, say not a word about any metallic deposits on the Blue Earth River or its tributaries.*

* [At a recent meeting of the Society, C. McNamara, Esq., a Civil Engineer of this State, presented some specimens of a mineral or metallic substance, apparently a sort of iron or

copper ore, which be took from a large deposit of the same in the bluffs of the Le Sueur river, near its continence with the Blue Earth. In presenting the specimen, Mr. McNamara stated that it seemed to him probable that this mineral deposit might have been the bed of ”ore“ which Le Sueur supposed to have been copper, as it scarcely seemed probable that Le Sueur would mistake common blue *clay* or earth, for copper ore. Penicaud, in his Relation, (Minn. Histor. Coll., Vol. III, P. 8,) speaks of the deposit as extending many miles on the river. Mr. McNamara says the deposit examined by him, is also found several miles along the bluffs. No assay of the specimens has been made, and its exact value is not, therefore determined.—W.]

With Le Sueur , the French explorations of Minnesota, appear to have ceased. It is stated that the white residents were obliged to leave the country in 1720, on account of the hostility of the Dakotas. Though this may have contributed to their departure, yet no doubt many traders were impoverished by the bursting of the celebrated Mississippi Company, projected by the infamous swindler, John Law . The professed object of this association, was the aggrandizement and cultivation of the colonies of France in North America; and the French Government enhanced its delusive credit, by assigning to it the whole Territory of Louisiana, of which this country was a district.

Thus, gentlemen of the Minnesota Historical Society, with such “materiel” as there was in my possession, I have attempted a sketch of the explorers of Minnesota during the 17th century. It is hoped that it is a mere introductory to other lectures from gentlemen who by a longer residence in the Territory, and careful observation, are not only able to please and instruct your Society, but to make contributions, that will be of value to the generations that will follow in our footsteps.

36

You have been organized at a most favorable period. On the bluff where we are assembled, there are temples of religion and education, the indubitable marks of the Angle-Saxon tread; yet around us, the skin-lodges of the Dakotas are still visible.

Our nearest village is the residence of the band that was here a century ago.* Their manners, customs and hunting grounds are much the same. The scalp-dance is yet enacted within our hearing, and not a year rolls by, but the soil of Minnesota is reddened with Ojibwa and Dakota blood.

* Three or four miles below St. Paul, is the village of the Kaposia baud of Dakotas, The whites call it Little Crow, the French having named a chief of the band, Chatonwahtooamany, Petit Corbean. In 1824, this chief visited Washington, and claimed to be the head chief of the whole Dakota nation. He has been dead for some years. In McKenne's and Hall's valuable History of the Indian Tribes of North America, there is the following annecdote:

Soon after peace was declared between the United States and Great Britain, in 1815, the Sioux were invited by the commanding officer at Drummond's Island, to visit that post. On their arrival, the Indians were informed by the officer. that he had sent for them to thank them in the name of his Majesty, for the aid they had rendered the British during the war, and for the bravery they had displayed on several occasions, as well as to communicate the intelligence of the peace which had been declared between the great belligerent parties. He concluded by pointing to a large pile of goods, that lay heaped upon the floor, which he told them were intended as presents for themselves. The Little Crow replied, that his people had been prevailed upon by the British to make war upon a people whom they scarcely knew, and who had never done them any harm.

“Now” continued he, “after we have fought for you, endured many hardships, lost some of our people, and awakened the vengeance of a powerful nation. our neighbors, you make a peace for yourselves, and leave us to get such terms as we can. You no longer need our services, and offer these goods as a compensation for having deserted us. But no —we will not take them; we hold them and yourselves in equal contempt.” So saying, he Spurned the articles of merchandize with his foot. and walked away. This conduct was

the more remarkable. from its inconsistency with the gravity and decorum with which the chiefs usually deport themselves on public occasions.

Legends, histories of their wars, customs, and superstitions; vocabularies of the tribes dwelling within our bounds, can be now easily collected, which a few years hence will be almost inaccessible.

Prosecute then the objects for which the Society was incorporated, with vigor. “Write your history as you go along,” and you will confer a favor upon the future inhabitants of Minnesota, for which they will be ever grateful.